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硕士学位论文

Information Loss in Simultaneous Interpreting

同声传译中的信息缺失

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Synopsis

Interpreters should convey information accurately and completely from source language to target language. In order to achieve the best interpreting quality and communication effect, any interpreter should try his/her best to avoid information loss in interpreting. The author, in this thesis, defines information loss in interpreting, and attempts to find out the causes of information loss in SI. Strategies and coping tactics are suggested to prevent information loss in SI.

It consists of four chapters excluding an introduction and a conclusion.

In introduction, the author explains the motive and necessity of presenting this thesis. The statement starts from a brief review of interpreting research on information fidelity, with a conclusion that few literatures are contributed on information loss. The significance of this thesis is also proved from the important role of information loss in information fidelity and interpreting quality.

Chapter One defines information in interpreting (CI and SI) based on a general definition of information. Information loss is defined as loss of information units. To be specific, it is loss of information points, incompleteness of information level or information structure.

Chapter Two analyzes how simultaneous interpreters process information in the overall interpreting process. The author proposes a basic model of SI based on two communication models and information processing models, after a review of information processing models in SI. The author points out that noise is an important factor in SI. Noise interferes communication and leads to information loss.

Chapter Three makes attempts to find out the causes of information loss in SI by analyzing the model proposed in Chapter Two. Information loss arises because of the interpreter's language incompetence, cultural incompetence and his/her mismanagement of attention.

Chapter Four puts forward strategies and coping tactics to prevent information loss in SI. Strategies to enhance language, cultural and attention management competence are proposed for interpreters. Coping tactics offer some help for them to maintain balanced distribution of processing capacity.

Conclusion makes a summary of the overall thesis. It is hoped that the thesis can contribute to interpreting studies from information fidelity approach.

Key Words: information loss; noise; simultaneous interpreting (SI).

摘要

在口译过程中，译员必须将原语这一方的信息完整无误地传达给目的语那一方。为了取得最佳的口译质量和交际效果，译员要尽可能地避免信息缺失和信息错误。本文分析同传过程中造成信息缺失的原因，并提出避免信息缺失的策略。本文除前言和结语以外共四章。

前言部分作者解释了撰写该论文的动机和意义。通过对目前口译研究的回顾，作者发现口译质量方面信息忠实度的文献相对较少，对于信息缺失的焦点性研究更少。然而，信息在口译过程中占有举足轻重的地位。因此信息缺失的研究具有相当的意义。

第一章首先提出口译中信息缺失的定义。作者先借鉴信息的一般定义，提出口译的信息定义，然后界定了信息缺失的定义。口译中的信息缺失指的是信息单位的缺失，具体而言，就是信息点的缺失，信息意层或者信息结构的不完整。

第二章探讨同传译员在口译过程中如何处理信息。作者在分析同传信息处理的特点以及前人提出的同传信息处理模式之后，借鉴了上述的信息模式和交际学理论的两个交际模式，构建了新的同传的基本模式。该模式中的一个重要因素是噪音。同传过程中噪音的存在给信息传递带来了负面的影响，往往使信息无法准确完整地传达给听众，造成信息缺失。

第三章根据第二章构建的模式，分析造成信息缺失的原因。通过同传过程的分析，导致噪音的三个原因得以确定：译者语言能力不足、文化能力不足以及注意力分配不当。

第四章就信息缺失的问题提出避免同传中信息缺失的策略和应对技巧。译员不仅要提高语言、文化的素质，而且要合理地分配注意力。口译过程中译员还可采取应对技巧，避免信息缺失。

关键词：信息缺失；噪音；同声传译。

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One Definition of Information Loss in Interpreting.....	3
1 Definition of information in interpreting.....	3
2 Measurement of information in interpreting.....	6
3 Definition of information loss in interpreting.....	7
Chapter Two A Basic Model of SI.....	11
1 Information processing in SI.....	11
1.1 Features of information processing in SI.....	11
1.1.1 Multitasks.....	11
1.1.2 Heavy time pressure.....	12
1.2 Information processing models in SI.....	13
1.2.1 Review of information processing models in SI.....	13
1.2.2 Comments on processing models.....	15
2 A basic model of SI.....	15
2.1 Two communication models.....	16
2.1.1 A basic model of communication.....	16
2.1.2 Shannon and Weaver's model of communication.....	17
2.2 A basic model of SI.....	18
2.3 Noise in SI.....	22
Chapter Three Causes of Information Loss.....	25
1 Language incompetence.....	25
2 Cultural incompetence.....	27
2.1 Macro- cultural incompetence.....	29
2.2 Micro- cultural incompetence.....	30

3 Mismanagement of attention.....	31
3.1. Attention in SI.....	31
3.2 Processing capacity in SI.....	31
3.3 Processing capacity problems.....	32
3.4 Interpreter's on-line strategies.....	35
 Chapter Four Strategies and Coping Tactics to Prevent Information Loss.....	 37
1 Strategies.....	37
1.1. Language competence enhancement	37
1.1.1. Interpreter's language competence.....	37
1.1.2 Language competence enhancement.....	41
1.2 Cultural competence enhancement.....	42
1.2.1 Definitions of culture.....	42
1.2.2 Interpreter as a cultural mediator.....	43
1.2.3 Cultural competence enhancement.....	44
1.2.3.1 Macro-cultural competence enhancement.....	44
1.2.3.2 Micro-cultural competence enhancement.....	46
1.3 Memory training.....	49
2 Coping tactics.....	51
2.1 Consulting documents in the booth.....	51
2.2 Using the boothmate's help.....	52
2.3 Changing the order of elements in an enumeration.....	53
2.4 Instant naturalization.....	54
2.5 Referring delegates to another information source.....	55
 Conclusion.....	 56
Bibliography.....	58
Acknowledgements.....	63

目 录

引言	1
第一章 口译信息缺失的定义	3
1. 信息在口译中的定义	3
2. 信息在口译中的测量	6
3. 口译信息缺失的定义	7
第二章 同传的基本模式	11
1. 同传的信息处理	11
1.1 同传信息处理的特点	11
1.1.1 任务多	11
1.1.2 时间紧	12
1.2 同传信息处理的模式	13
1.2.1 同传信息处理模式的回顾	13
1.2.2 对同传信息处理模式的评价	15
2. 同传的基本模式	15
2.1 两个交际模式	16
2.1.1 交际的基本模式	16
2.1.2 香农和维纳的交际模式	17
2.2 同传的基本模式	18
2.3 同传中的噪音	22
第三章 信息缺失的原因	25
1. 语言能力不足	25
2. 文化能力不足	27
2.1 宏观文化能力不足	29

2.2 微观文化能力不足.....	30
3. 注意力分配不当.....	31
3.1 同传中的注意力.....	31
3.2 同传中的信息处理能力.....	31
3.3 同传中信息处理产生的问题.....	32
3.4 译员现场的策略.....	35
第四章 防止信息缺失的策略和应对技巧.....	37
1. 策略.....	37
1.1 语言能力的提高.....	37
1.1.1 译员的语言能力.....	37
1.1.2 语言能力的提高.....	41
1.2 文化能力的提高.....	42
1.2.1 文化的定义.....	42
1.2.2 译员担任文化传播者的角色.....	43
1.2.3 文化能力的提高.....	44
1.2.3.1 宏观文化能力的提高.....	44
1.2.3.2 微观文化能力的提高.....	46
1.3 记忆力训练.....	49
2. 应对技巧.....	51
2.1 查阅工作间内的资料.....	51
2.2 获得工作间内其他译员的帮助.....	52
2.3 改变列举各项的顺序.....	53
2.4 即时的语言移植.....	54
2.5 请与会者参照其他资料.....	55
结语.....	56
参考书目.....	58
致谢.....	63

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Introduction

Interpreting is an activity consists of establishing, either simultaneously or consecutively, oral or gestural communication between two or more speakers who are not speaking the same language. It is more than the rendition of information from the source language to the target language semantically and syntactically. Interpreting is a communicative activity with an intercultural background. As Cai Xiaohong and Fang Fanquan advocate, interpreting is not simply the transformation of the language involved, but faithful conveyance of the communicative intentions of the two parties with different languages in certain settings (2002:280). With the help of the interpreter, people with different languages and cultures transmit information with each other.

The interpreter's task is to ensure the successful information flow from the speaker to the audience. As a mediator, interpreter helps achieve communication intentions via information flow. Completeness and accuracy are two criteria for interpreters to bear in their mind in terms of information transmission. Any information loss or error will have negative effect on communication and interpreting quality.

Interpreting researchers have done a lot of theoretical and empirical research on interpreting quality evaluation with fruitful results. However, only a few of them center on information fidelity which is one of the most important indices to assess interpreting quality. Information fidelity has been examined from different perspectives. Gile (1984) studied how terminology affected information fidelity. He (1995) did fidelity assessment in consecutive interpretation in class, and found out that few students noticed interpreter's information errors. Several years later, he (1998) compared the accuracy of simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting, and proved that the former was superior to the latter in an overall accuracy. Moser-Mercer, Alexander Künzli and Marina Korac (1998) sought to investigate the effect of

increased time in simultaneous interpreting on the quality of interpretation and on physiological and psychological stress. They concluded that interpreters working for longer than approximate thirty minutes, the recommended turn time in simultaneous interpreting under standard working conditions, risked a decline in quality of output which appears to be due to a combination of psychological and physiological factors.

Among the papers on information fidelity, papers on information loss are rare. Interpreting researchers have made the consensus that information loss and errors are two indices to evaluate information fidelity. The greater number of information loss and errors, the lower the information fidelity; the smaller, the higher. However, there has not even a single paper focused on information loss or errors despite of their indispensable position in quality evaluation. No papers are contributed to looking into how information loss arises in SI. Neither do researchers explore the reasons behind and put forward suggestions to prevent information loss. Therefore, it is of significance to study information loss in interpreting.

Chapter One Definition of Information Loss in interpreting

1. Definition of information in interpreting

The word information in English was derived by adding the common “noun of action” ending “-ation”, which was descended through French from Latin “-tio”, to the earlier verb to inform, in the sense of to give form to the mind, to discipline, instruct and teach. Inform itself comes (via French) from the Latin verb informare, meaning to give form to, to form an idea of. Furthermore, Latin itself has already contained the word informatio meaning concept or idea, but the extent to which this may have influenced the development of the word information in English is unclear.

Oxford English Dictionary (1989: 289) defines information as the act of informing, or giving form or shape to the mind, as in education, instruction, or training. It is also used for an item of training, e.g., a particular instruction.

The term “information” as a concept bears a diversity of meanings, is used differently by individuals in different disciplines, from specialists in communication and information management, to those in computing and cognitive sciences. It is of great difficulty to define information. So far there have been over one hundred definitions of information.

Informationists define information as messages, or measure of freedom of choices. The first scientific concept of information was put forward by R.V.L.Hartley in 1928 who defines information as the number of possible messages, independent of whether they are meaningful. He thinks that the information exists in the transmitted symbols. When someone receives information, each received symbol allows recipient to “eliminate possibilities,” excluding other symbols and their associated meanings. “The precision of information depends upon what other symbols sequences might have been chosen.”(Hartley 1928: 535-63)

N. Wiener holds in 1948 that “information is information, not matter or

energy.”(N. Wiener 1961:23) He put forward his definition in 1954 as that “information is a name for the content of what is exchanged with the outer world as we adjust to it, and make our adjustment felt upon it. The process of receiving and of using information is the process of our adjusting to the contingencies of the outer environment, and of our living effectively within the environment.”(N. Wiener 1954:27)

In information theory, information is used in a special sense; it is a measure of the freedom of choice with which a message is selected from the set of all possible messages. The greater the information is in a message, the lower its randomness, or “noisiness,” and hence the smaller its entropy (C. E. Shannon 1949:98).

Economists have applied information theory into economy in which information has been regarded as data or knowledge. “Information is data endowed with relevance and purpose. Converting data into information requires knowledge.”(P. E. Drucker 1999:5) Information has also got the meaning of “the participants’ knowledge of game theory, especially the knowledge of natural selection, and the knowledge of other people’s features and reactions.”(Zhang Weiying 1996:47-48)

Information management specialists share different views in defining information, which is in the sense of “what has been transmitted in a message and understood by the recipients.”(M Hale 1991:336)

Many specialists have developed useful definitions of information for specific disciplines. Some definitions may be consistent with ideas held by several disciplines. These interdisciplinary definitions are superior in some senses to discipline specific definitions, as general definition encompasses all the phenomena of interest to the field that is covered by the specific definition and is consistent with the specific definition. Many attempts have been made to give a general definition of information since 1970s.

A recent development has been made by Hsieh Chingchun and Hsieh Yingchun from Ming Chung University of Taiwan. They (2007) define information as “the form/sign of *what is known* expressed by media material by author” at the information

creation side; at the receiving side, information is defined as “the sign/form that we can receive”. The interpretation of the sign/form depends on the expression system used and the readership context. Media here refers to material; instruments and tools; techniques or technology; expression system such as languages and semiotic systems. Media, the gene of information, do have effect of interpretation of information.

This definition outweighs other general definitions in treating information as a physical entity. The definition includes both the abstract part (content) and the physical part (form) of information and clarifies the co-exist situation of these two parts. What is known is the content of information, or the signified; while the form of expression is the physical part of information, or the signifier. The definition can be used in any field including natural and social sciences, humanities and esthetics. It clarifies the concepts and relations among such commonly used terms as data, facts, knowledge and information.

This general definition of information can be applied to interpreting. In the process of interpreting, the interpreter functions both as a listener and a speaker. S/he first works as a listener who listens to the speaker though the information from the speaker is not directed to him/her. Then s/he acts as a speaker, delivering information to the audience, though s/he is not giving his/her own opinion. The information flows from the speaker to the audience when the interpreter serves as an important intermediary. Therefore, the interpreter functions both as the information receiving side and later the information creation side in specific interpreting tasks.

Based on the general definition, the author proposes a definition of information in interpreting. At the information creation side, the information in interpreting can be defined as “the form/sign of what is known expressed in verbal or non-verbal signs by speaker or the sign/form of what is known expressed in verbal or non-verbal signs by interpreter”. At the receiving side, the information in interpreting can be defined as “the form/sign that interpreter or audience receive”.

Information created by speaker is expressed in source language (verbal signs),

with its phonetic and prosodic components, and non-verbal signs including speaker's facial expressions, gestures and postures; information originated by interpreter also comprises verbal and non-verbal signs, which refers to target language and interpreter's facial expressions, gestures respectively. As consecutive interpreters communicate face to face with audience, the information sent by them and received by audience comprises both verbal and non-verbal signs. However, as simultaneous interpreters are sitting in the booth during interpreting, their facial expressions and gestures can hardly be seen by audience. Therefore, information received by audience in SI only comprises verbal signs

2. Measurement of information in interpreting

Information can be measured. The information indices of the interpretation evaluation are usually considered as the most important factors for measuring the fidelity of interpretation. The information units, namely, the units of measurement of the information indices, are essentials of interpretation quality evaluation. However, there has never appeared any systematic exposition concerning the identification as well as the definition of information units until Cai Xiaohong, on the strength of the exposition of the relevant subjects, defines the information units of the interpretation quality evaluation in terms of the nature of translation, the distinction between the units of measurement and the units of translation, and the relationship between information units and discourse analysis.

Apart from morpheme, the minimum information unit, there are other information units in a certain discourse. They can be defined as:

- (i) Information point or semantic unit, which can be words, word-groups or sense-groups;
- (ii) Information level, which refers to a complete message level. For instance, a cause in a cause-effect relation can be defined as an information level, a place or a time in a narrative structure is an information level;

(iii) Information structure, which refers to a complete message structure, e.g., a view, an event or a relation (Cai Xiaohong 2003:78). In the discourse, the information points spread horizontally to realize the information levels, while the information levels run vertically to build up the information structure.

3. Definition of information loss in interpreting

Information loss, in terms of measurement, is the loss of information units. To be more specific, it is the loss of information point, the incompleteness of information level and information structure. This definition can be applied to SI, as well as CI.

Information loss is measured by comparing the information in the original speech with the information in interpretation. The comparison of the information is demonstrated by analyzing the information respectively.

The following example is used to explain the definition of information loss in interpreting proposed by the author. The original speech is an excerpt from a public speech entitled *Taking Control at Work: Enjoying Your Work* (Zhuang Hongshan & Xiao Xiaoyan 2004: 67). The excerpt comprises 29 information points and 8 information levels, which are 3 effects, 3 causes, 1 transition and 1 condition. Simultaneous interpreting was done by the author for the explanation.

Information analysis of the original speech:

Information level:

Information point:

1 We all know that

2 we should take better care of ourselves,

3 relax,

4 and enjoy our work.

Transition

5 However,

Effect

6 it's easy to overlook the opportunities to
do that

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